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SUBJECT: HIGH-LEVEL EXCHANGES BETWEEN SYRIA AND IRAN  
CONTINUE

¶1. (U) Iranian Defense Minister Mostafa Mohammed Najjar arrived in Damascus March 10 to meet with SARG counterpart MinDef General Hassan Turkmani. The primary topic of discussion, according to local media, was the transfer of Iranian arms manufacturing to Syria. An-Nahar, a Lebanese daily, quoted Najjar as saying, &what Iran possesses in terms of defense capabilities is Syria,s too.8 Other topics discussed included regional political developments and expansion of cooperation between the Syrian and Iranian armies, according to local media. Najjar,s visit is only one of several between Iran and Syria in the past week, highlighting the continued close cooperation between the two countries.

¶2. (U) On March 8, Iranian First VP Parviz Davoodi, accompanied by the Iranian Minister of Industry, visited Damascus to inaugurate the Syrian production line of the Iranian car manufacturer Samand; the car will be known in Syria as the Sham (apparently a reference to the traditional Arabic name for Damascus). Davoodi met with President Asad, VP Shara,a and PM Otri, and invited SARG PM Otri to visit Tehran March 14-16, according to local press. Otri will lead the Syrian delegation to a meeting of the Syria-Iran Joint Higher Committee, which will discuss further economic development opportunities between Syria and Iran. (Note: PM Otri,s trip to Tehran was originally scheduled for February, but was postponed for an unspecified reason. End Note.)

¶3. (U) January and February also saw several other exchanges between the two countries. Iranian National Security Council chairman Ali Akbar Larijani visited Damascus in mid-January to meet with Syrian and Palestinian officials based here, including Hamas leaders, according to local media. President Asad (accompanied by VP Shara,a, FM Mu,allim, and Assistant FM Arnous) spent two days in Iran in mid-February, reportedly meeting with Iranian President Admedinejad, Ayatollah Khameni, National Security Adviser Larijani, and former President (and now Chairman of the Expediency Council) Rafsanjani. Separate SARG visits to Tehran during this time also included FM Mu,allim, Minister of Communications Amr Salem, and Minister of Culture Riad Nassan-Agha, who attended Aleppo cultural week in Isfahan, Iran,s capital of Islamic culture.  
CORBIN